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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a contextual statement from which to consider contemporary educational problems. The operations of the curriculum system in an urban environment are surveyed. The three primary functions of the system (production, implementation, and evaluation) have been described in depth. It is suggested that issues such as decentralization, control, relevance of content, and improved instruction are basically curriculum questions with interrelated functions and effects upon the total curriculum system. Examples are cited from the Chicago Public Schools as a typical urban school system. [Not available in hard copy due to original legibility of original dccument.] (Author/DM)

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THE CURRICULUM SYSTEM OPERATING IN URBAN SCHOOLS*

by

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Introduction

Another paper has suggested the theoretical basis and definition of basic curriculum concerns. This paper extends that discussion by describing the operation of a curriculum system within an urban school context. Hopefully, this presentation will lend some perspective to these concerns:

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--control over the curriculum and its relevance

--accountability, decentralization and community control

--adapting the curriculum to the urban child

--the principal and improvement of instruction

--curriculum attitudes, evaluation, and budget

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A curriculum system is a system for decision-making and action with respect to curriculum function. According to Beauchamp (Curriculum Theory), a curriculum system has three primary functions:

1. to produce a curriculum;
2. to implement a curriculum; and
3. to appraise the effectiveness of a curriculum and a curriculum system.

The following pages will detail each of these three functions, and when germaine, examples of the curriculum operations of an urban school system, the Chicago Public Schools, will be cited.

Producing a Curriculum

To plan and produce a curriculum requires that attention be paid to:

a. selection and involvement of people in planning;
b. procedures and structures for curriculum planning; and
c. the selection of curriculum content.

a. Involvement In and Control Of Curriculum Planning: In urban school systems four levels of involvement of persons in curriculum planning are possible. First of all, the central office staff of experts can prepare, publish, and disseminate curriculum materials. This level of planning is most likely to be found in large urban systems. This central office procedure assumes that curriculum planning is a technical process that should be directed by trained specialists, and that since the curriculum is planned by these duly authorized experts, it will follow that the teachers will surely implement that curriculum.

A variation of this central office practice involves joint planning by experts and representatives of classroom teacher groups from building units or the entire system. The same kind of assumption with regard to the involvement of persons prevails. The only difference is that the experts call upon

representatives of the classroom teacher group for advice. This sampling of representative teachers apparently will reflect the problems faced by teachers when implementing the curriculum.

The third level of involvement includes all the professional personnel in a school or system. Probably more curricula have been developed through this type of involvement than any other, and this is especially true of smaller school units and districts. The involvement of all professional personnel is based on a different set of assumptions. First is the belief that those who apply the curriculum should share in its construction. A number of reputable research studies attest to the validity of this belief. This level of involvement has psychological value in that teachers become ego-involved, and involvement in planning is most likely to increase the likelihood of the curriculum being implemented. Second is the feeling that if all professional staff are involved, the curriculum produced will more nearly reflect the philosophy and objectives of the total staff rather than just the views of the central office experts.

A fourth type of involvement is an extension of the third. In this case the professional personnel share responsibility for curriculum planning with representative lay citizens. Those who suggest this approach advocate the same general beliefs as those who would include all members of the school staff. They also recognize that basic decisions relative to what should be taught in schools ought to be made by members of the school's neighborhood or the community in which the school is located. This is what many refer to as community control. For only by including representative laymen in the process of curriculum planning can the curriculum experts and teachers be assured that they

are carrying out the wishes of the community. A further advantage of this strategy lies in the strength of support for the urban school program that results from community representatives being readily conversant with the goals, nature and content of the curriculum adopted.

Because of difficulties in communication, city schools often meet with the frustration of having sound school programs rejected by their communities because citizens do not understand them. Involvement of community people, as well as teachers, is one way of disseminating information about the school program and of establishing confidence in it. When such involvement is exercised in curriculum planning at the building level, true decentralization exists and community control is realized.

Basic conceptions of authority and responsibility for educational programs almost dictate which of these four forms of involvement will be adopted. In the U.S., education is considered to be a legal function of the state. In turn, state governments have delegated their responsibility to the local school district. From a purely legal point of view, authority and responsibility for education rests upon the patron group within each school unit or system. These elected or appointed boards of education serve as official agents of the state. Certain authority and responsibility for educational decisions are delegated by school boards to professional groups. When such delegation of function is unclear, as if often the case with regard to curriculum planning, conflicts between lay and professional personnel may result. Thus, the degree of concord or conflict is, in part, a function of the choice of level of involvement in curriculum planning. The unfortunate situation in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville District suggested that clear-cut definitions of the roles of professional

personnel and lay groups are essential if conflicts are to be avoided and cooperative efforts to be achieved.

b. Procedure for Curriculum Planning: Those involved in curriculum planning must analyze the contribution the school can and should make to the improvement of urban social, economic and political life, as well as its obligations to the individuals who attend the school. Both the historical background of American Education and its contemporary objectives need to be considered when the direction of the curriculum is being considered.

Curriculum decisions reached in the process of curriculum planning are three dimensional. First, thorough analyses must be made of the content, skills, and attitudes to be taught in the subject areas and at the various levels of pupil maturity. Second, a thorough acquaintance with the characteristics of children and youth in general, as well as with the particular characteristics of the current students, must be part of the repertoire of those who plan the curriculum. And thirdly, the type of curriculum organization, be it subject-centered, broad fields, or persistent life situations, in large part determines and structures content inputs, instructional strategies, as well as mirrors the basic philosophy of the curriculum planners.

No specific organization for curriculum planning will fit every school or system. The type adopted will depend somewhat on whether one building unit or several schools are involved, whether planning is centralized or decentralized, whether the school is elementary or secondary, and whether the total school program or just one subject area is under consideration. Organization needs to be such that curriculum planning may be both vertical with the subject area and horizontal by grade level. Whatever the case, each group organized to carry

on some specific function must find its own ways and means of working.

The actual translation of curicular decisions into a written document--called the curriculum guide--is the culmination of the planning process. It is this document--a schema of what is to be taught--which serves as the input to the instructional system, or how it is to be taught. In other words, the curriculum guide is supposed to serve the teacher as a point of departure for teaching.

c. The Selection of Content and the Question of Relevance: Since the curriculum is supposed to be an overall design for the educational experiences of pupils in school, the act of curriculum planning must, of necessity, be a selective one in deciding which elements of the total culture are to be transmitted to the student. After the universal elements have been determined, planning groups can address themselves to the question of what else should be taught in the schools. Answers to this question will be derived from an analysis of the specialized function that schools are to serve: such as college preparation, vocational training, or serving the handicapped student; plus the internal and external influences or constraints on the curriculum.

Two important internal criteria that should be foremost in the planner's thinking are accuracy and relevance. With regard to accuracy, Ralph Tyler (Agenda for the Nation) suggests that an estimated one-third to one-half of the content of current textbooks is either false and distorted or no longer considered important by scholars. Certainly, curriculum planners must be aware of this limitation both in terms of selecting textbooks and in the acutal curriculum planning, since it is commonplace for planners to base their curriculum upon the master design of a textbook series.

The curriculum content currently in use is also unsatisfactory if it does not speak to the concerns of students. The changes taking place in modern society create new opportunities and problems. The experience of the past, the organized knowledge of scholarship, and the modes of inquiry developed to seek answers to vital questions can contribute much to helping students cope and surmont the problems they encounter daily.

The great importance of the quality and relevance of curriculum content is not well understood by the public. Man's development and survival depends in large part on his ability to distinguish fact from fancy, myth from reality, superstition from scientific generalization and upon his ability to employ intelligent and systematic procedures in sloving daily problems and functioning effectively as a citizen. Curriculum content without contact with sound, responsible scholarship is no more sound as a basis for education than is street corner conversation.

Fantini and Weinstein (The Disadvantaged) offer the curriculum planner another caution or constraint. In addition to the school's formal curriculum, curriculum planners must be aware of the pervasive influence of a second curriculum, the less formal, hidden curriculum. Many para-school forces such as mass media, social agencies, and peer groups to name a few, are constantly at work shaping the student's interests, attitudes, and values. Fantini and Weinstein argue that the education and socialization of any given child is far from limited to the four walls of the classroom, in that just as the formal curriculum has a school setting, which is subdivided into classroom units, and produces a student culture, so the hidden curriculum has a neighborhood setting, which is subdivided into family units and produces a sibling and peer culture.

Both of these types of curriculum serve to teach and socialize the individual and to equip him with the skills, knowledge and attitudes which will underlie his adult functioning in society. Obviously, if the formal curriculum is to achieve its purpose, it must be consistent with, or at least accomodating of, the learning imparted by the hidden curriculum. Certainly, the incongruence between formal and hidden curriculum is strongest in the inner-city school. Achieving consistency in these instances is perhaps the most formidable task for the curriculum planner. However, Fantini and Weinstein suggest that even schools in "well off" neighborhoods may likewise have a discrepancy between the two curriculums, and therefore are, in fact, disadvantaged schools, in a very real sense of the word.

In addition to these internal influences, the curriculum planner must also deal with external influences upon the curriculum. For one, legislative enactments that bear upon the curriculum must be considered. In metropolitan systems the total school district or the sub-districts containing multiple units may prescribe certain rules or certain curriculum practices that all building units must abide by in their curriculum planning. How necessary conformity to such proposals is, depends upon the degree of conformity that the central office imposes upon the schools. Obviously, the general superintendent bears the responsibility for all school practices within that system, including the curriculum. However, he may delegate to local leadership, freedom to deviate from general rules and regulations when changes will serve local populations better. A second influence that needs to be taken into account is national proposals for education, particularly those supported by the National Defense Education Act, and more recently, the title series of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act. Federal monies which become available for special curricula, the latest being allocations for courses in environmental control, can strongly influence the curriculum planner's choice of content.

At this point, it may be helpful to give a concrete example of this first function of a curriculum system, namely, curriculum production. In a survey by Robert Havighurst, The Public Schools of Chicago, the Chicago procedure for curriculum development was described. This procedure, with some minor changes, is basically the same today. It has five distinctive characteristics:

1. Curriculum planning is done for the entire school system through the Central Office. General curriculum policy is determined by the Curriculum Council which consists of the general superintendent, the curriculum superintendent, all district superintendents, all directors of bureaus connected with the curriculum, representatives from citizens organization, and University specialists from six nearby schools, as well as representatives of principals and classroom teachers. As a result of an intensive survey of the system by an independent consulting firm in 1968, decentralization of school planning was initiated with the establishment of three area superintendencies. In terms of curriculum planning, only nominal progress has been made at the area level. However, curriculum planning at the local building level is being attempted at the first of the Magnet Schools, and in at least two of the COPLUS or Model Cities Schools.

2. The work of curriculum planning is done by a specialized curriculum staff with the help of selected classroom teachers working on committees. The responsibility of a study committee is to revise the curriculum in a given subject area and at a given grade level. This process of revision follows a four year cycle.

3. The procedure of the curriculum staff is to read books in the appropriate field, consult with unviersity personnel, secure evaluations of the current curriculum materials and to pilot test new materials.

4. The curriculum is organized around separate subjects rather than around a correlation or a fusion design. The typical product of the curriculum staff is a published guide which contains suggestions for the content to be taught and also a manual of suggested methods for the teacher.

5. The implementation of the curriculum guides in the classroom is done by the Central Office staff who have been included in the first four phases of the work. The curriculum consultants and supervisors are expected to work with district superintendents and school principals to get them to introduce the materials to classroom teachers and guide them in their use. This mention of implementation leads us to the second function of a curriculum system.

Implementation of a Curriculum

The very best curriculum accomplishes little unless it is implemented through the instructional program. A necessary prerequisite for curriculum implementation is the commitment by teachers to use the curriculum as a point of departure for developing instructional or teaching strategies. This strength of commitment may be enhanced in at least two ways. First, by teacher participation in curriculum planning, and second, by effective administrative leadership.

As was suggested earlier, curriculum implementation is facilitated if teachers who are to use the curriculum, participate in its planning. In effect, involvement leads to closure, in this case, implementation. Johansen (Journal

of Educational Research) summarized the results of a number of studies including his own, and concluded that teacher participation in planning increased the likelihood of implementation, but he cautioned against assuming that participation alone would insure implementation.

For instance, Beauchamp (Curriculum Theory) has suggested that the degree to which teachers feel the curriculum is appropriate for their students, is an important barrier or incentive to implementation. When the curriculum is not appropriate to the student, the teacher has two alternatives, if she is ingenious and has the time, she can adapt it, otherwise, she can simply ignore it. In attempting to solve this problem of pupil differences some school systems are planning curriculums for three student groups: a normal, an upper ability, and a low ability group, in hopes making the curriculum appropriate to individual students.

Strength of commitment may also be enhanced if administrative and supervisory personnel are committed to leadership in curriculum implementation. Recent research on leadership expectations strongly indicate that the school principal is the key person in both the production and implementation of curriculum materials. The amount of interest and enthusiasm the principal shows for the inservice training of his teachers correlates higly with the degree to which the curriculum is implemented.

In terms of the Havighurst study of the Chicago Schools, response of teachers to the Teachers Questionaire indicated that the guides were not useful for teaching pupils who were more than a year below their grade level in reading ability. Questionaire responses also indicated that in schools where the principal conceived his role as one of exercising responsibility for the use of the guides, the guides were generally well used. But where the principal took no

such responsibility, only a few teachers found the guides helpful, while the others found little or no use for them. From interviews with over 300 classroom teachers and about 100 principals, it became clear that there was a great range in the usage of the guides. Some used the guides for the subject in which they felt the least competent. Some did not use them at all, while others felt that they had to use them, and some even felt that the guides were an integral part of making the school function!

The Havighurst survey concluded that the guides needed to be adapted to the schools of the low income areas of the city and that teachers needed more help and direction in the use of guides and supplements. Since 1964, the Chicago Public Schools have developed multiple curricula in some areas, such as language arts, to accomodate different student academic needs. The call for increased inservice training has been partially met with a bi-monthly staff meeting devoted exclusively to inservice training, and by an increase in the number of curriculum consultants. However, it still appears that curricula can best be adapted to individual and ethnic differences if teachers are involved at the planning stage too, rather than just at the implementation stage.

Evaluation of the Curriculum System

Beauchamp (Curriculum Theory) lists four dimensions of curriculum evaluation: 1. evaluation of teacher use of the curriculum; 2. evaluation of the design; 3. evaluation of pupil outcomes; and 4. evaluation of the system itself. Until recently, "evaluation" was used in a rather non-rigorous sense, probably due to its low priority in educator's minds and budgets, and the limited number of competent researchers to evaluate educational programs. Consequently,

experience and data for these four dimensions is quite limited.

Simple observation of the number of teachers who implement the curriculum provides adequate data on teacher use. Another index would be measures of teacher attitudes toward the planned curriculum they are supposed to implement.

Evaluation of curriculum design is more difficult because of the absence of adequate criteria and the dissimilarity of various extant curriculum designs. Research in this area is desperately needed.

Evaluation of the system itself and prediction of pupil outcomes are perhaps the most difficult. Yet they are needed if educator's hope to achieve some systematic means of increasing instructional efficiency.

The Havighurst study dealt with the first two evaluation dimensions. Between 50 and 60 percent of elementary teachers said that they used the guides in the four basic subject areas "often". These same guides were rated by 31 to 41 percent as "excellent". Guides in Science were preferred most often, those in Social Studies least. High school teachers made less use of the guides than did elementary teachers. The less experienced teachers at both the elementary and secondary level found the guides less helpful than did the more experienced teachers.

Several methods were used to evaluate the basic design for revising curriculum materials. Among these methods used by the curriculum planners were questionaires sent to teachers and university specialists asking for criticism of old programs and pilot and field testing of new proposed programs.

At the present time, the appropriated budget for evaluation of curriculum projects in the Chicago school system is only a fraction of the sum needed and requested. Unfortunately, this indictment can probably be leveled at most

school systems today.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted a contextual statement from which one might more easily deal with some of the many problems encountered on the education scene today. This paper surveyed the operations of the curriculum system within an urban environment, describing its three primary functions in depth: production, implementation, and evaluation. This paper has suggested that such current issues as decentralization, control, relevance of content, improved instruction, and so on, are basically curriculum questions that must be dealt with in terms of their interrelated functions and effects upon the total curriculum system. And finally, this paper, in citing examples of the operation of the curriculum system of the Chicago Public Schools, intended only a descriptive commentary of what appears to be a typical urban school system, and not an evaluative dictim.

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